

# Influence of the interrelations between power and opposition on democracy in Poland. Selected aspects

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## Abstract

This article substantiates theoretical and methodological approaches regarding the impact of the power–opposition interrelations on the strengthening and weakening of democracy. Based on the analysis of a number of indicators and modern political process in Poland, it has been concluded that democratisation takes place against the backdrop of the permanent formation and preservation of two opposed poles in the political space. Deflection from democracy increases the distance between two competing/conflicting parties – pro-government and opposition. This situation automatically accumulates the potential of pole's force. Therefore, the interrelations between the power and the opposition turn into the force of stratification and equalisation that allows reducing the "democracy deficit" and bring the political system into the state of equilibrium.

**Keywords:** Poland, power, opposition, political parties, social capital, democracy deficit.

## Wpływ współzależności między władzą a opozycją na demokrację w Polsce. Wybrane aspekty

### Streszczenie

W artykule wskazano teoretyczne i metodologiczne ujęcia dotyczące wpływu wzajemnych relacji władza–opozycja na wzmocnienie i osłabianie demokracji. Na podstawie analizy szeregu wskaźników i współczesnego procesu politycznego w Polsce ustalono, że demokratyzacja przebiega na tle trwałego formowania i utrwalania relacji między dwoma przeciwstawnymi biegunami w sferze politycznej. Odchodzenie od demokracji zwiększa dystans między dwiema konkurującymi ze sobą

stronami – prorządową i opozycyjną. Automatycznie gromadzi to potencjał sily bieguna. Współzależności między władzą a opozycją zamieniają się w siłę rozwarstwienia i wyrównywania, co pozwala na zmniejszenie „deficytu demokracji” i doprowadzenie ustroju do stanu równowagi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Polska, władza, opozycja, partie polityczne, kapitał społeczny, demokracja, deficyt demokracji

Despite equal initial conditions, the transition of post-socialist countries to democracy has led to different regime changes. For instance, Hungary had been demonstrating positive development dynamics, but recently has decelerated its pace facing the phenomenon of a democratic deficit. At the same time, countries that have the status of consolidated democracies, such as Poland, require the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of their democracy. The above-mentioned statement determines the need of revision and conceptualisation of factors that induce the nonlinear nature of the democratisation processes of modern political systems.

The development of democracy finds its reflection in power relations, which in one way or another should be aimed at its protection, consolidation of the achieved level and creation of optimal conditions for its further strengthening. In its turn, power becomes the goal of political actors, particularly for the state, political parties and interest groups.

Democracy provides one more actor – the opposition with political subjectivity, reflecting the dichotomy of public attitude towards the ruling power. The functioning of the legal opposition makes it possible to identify the existing "defects" of democracy and brings opposition to power or forces the government to improve implemented political line and fix them through institutional mechanisms. In this particular case, the opposition is studied as a certain doppelganger for the power and its potential subject capability of strengthening democracy through the implementation of the declared policy. There is no doubt that power–opposition interrelations are not always linear, symmetrical, rational or predictable in democratic states, but they are decisive in the light of the development of democratic processes.

The history has shown that success and irreversibility of democratic transformations in the Central and Eastern Europe countries were determined by the nature of the relationship between the main actors – the government and the opposition. In the context of systemic transformation, the constructive nature of the interaction between them induced political stability and precluded the use of force in domestic politics. It was required for further institutionalisation of democratic institutions and bringing the system into a state of equilibrium. Therefore, definition of the influence of the interrelations between the power and the opposition in relation to democracy in Poland is considered to be a *research topic of this article*. Thus, the following *research matters* remain open:

- justification of theoretical and methodological principles of relations between the power and opposition in the context of democratisation of the Polish political system;
- defining of strategies for accumulation and conversion of social capital of power and opposition for the sake of understanding the specifics of democratisation in Poland;

- detection, whether the relationship between power and opposition determines the disposition of the political field and its impact on democratisation.

Experience of Poland is a case with a dynamic empirical basis, which is useful for theoretical generalisations and verification of democratisation processes in the post-socialist space.

The degree of knowledge on the above-mentioned topic is quite fragmented. The relationship between power and opposition in the context of democratisation of political systems has been analysed through the perspective of institutionalism (Antoszewski 2014; Sula 2010; Kubát 2010). The structural and functional approach in researches of Z. Machelski (2016), K. Łabędź (2012) allowed to reveal the specifics of the development of the parliamentary opposition in Poland in the context of changes of nature of relations with the government. Works by P. Norton (Norton 2008), N. Natalina (Natalina 2008) provided an opportunity to clarify the relationship between the aggregate capital and conversion strategies of opposition and ruling parties.

## **Materials and methods**

This article examines particularity and nature of the pattern interrelations between political opposition and power and defines their impact on the democratisation of Poland. The combination of theories of social capital conversion, synergetic, fluctuation, institutionalism, and neo-institutionalism was defined as the most relevant methodological approach. On the grounds of the theory of social capital conversion, it was substantiated individual and group strategies of social capital conversion, clarified the dynamics of the objective structure of the political field, commensurability of dispositions between power and opposition, and the change of their boundaries during repositioning in each of the examined countries.

In this research the interrelationship between power and opposition is studied as a process of accumulation, conversion and exchange of capital during the process of struggle for the meta-capital of the state. The synergetic approach was applied in order to analyse the role of power and opposition as determinants of fluctuation and bifurcation, qualitative change in the state of the system in the range between chaos and order, and the ability of nonlinear dynamic systems to self-organise. Synergetics helped to establish the involvement of both the opposition and power in emergence of regular and strange attractors and their use as a resource for accumulation of political capital. The appliance of this approach as a methodological tool also assisted in determination of the relevant bond between the application of the emergence principle and the establishment of pattern interrelationship between power and opposition.

It was used the fluctuation theorem, developed by P. Sorokin as a component of his theory of social stratification in order to determine the influence of power–opposition relations on the fluctuation of the political system during the substitution of one political force by other. Such approach also allowed substantiating the relationship between opposition and power as a struggle of deterrence and stratification forces, to

understand better the causes of fluctuations in the profile of social stratification and to adjust the determinants of bringing the system to equilibrium. Institutional and neo-institutional approaches have been useful in defining the role of institutionalised and non-institutionalised, formal and informal political actors in the development of specific "game rules" regarding the distribution of state metacapital.

The opposition is being reviewed through neo-institutional and institutional approaches – as a specific political actor and political institution. The latter made it possible to narrow the understanding of opposition regarding specific political institutions that could play this role. The main ones are parliamentary political parties as an important subject and object of power. Power and opposition relations were considered through the "government–parliament" dichotomy. At the same time, opposition parties are not included in the government and take up a critical position towards its policy. According to Z. Machelski, "opposition is an institution of the political regime that has the main function to enable the alternation of power" (Machelski 2016: p. 13). Its existence is impossible in a system of equal subjects of power, where it is an independent political player, who legally competes for power. Despite the fact that attitude towards the power differentiates the status of power and opposition, political parties in power and opposition are considered to be equal participants in the political process.

"There can be no democratic systems, where the opposition does not have ample opportunities for action" (Łabędź 2012: p. 176). There is a strategy of competing for power and an alternative to power behind each opposition. The opposition does not participate in governing the country, but is a kind of symmetrical and equal analogue of the government majority. In practice, this leads to programmatic and personal alternative, as well as its justification in a broad political and social role. The fact is that "the periodic change of power groups arouses public expectations, relieves some of the social tension and, correspondingly, purifies the political atmosphere. It brings a new style of leadership and innovation into domestic political life" (Zwierzchowski 2000: p. 18).

However, one of the most important missions for the opposition is to determine the optimal course of action in liaising with the government. At the same time, the opposition strives for a dominant influence on the executive branch. Its important strategic task is to be transformed into a parliamentary majority with the prospect of forming a government. Two main models of relations between opposition and power have been formed in the European constitutional tradition, namely, *confrontational and consensual*. The first is based on the statement that power and opposition are two steadily conflicting political forces. Their relationship is based on the following three approaches: competition for power; tolerance during its implementation; changes of government officials during the elections.

Confrontational model of relations lies in the process, when each of the subjects aspires to impose its own vision of resolving the problem, realising their own interests and goals at the expense of the opponent by various means. Confrontation between the parties is possible, when it comes to the decisions and actions of state institutions

aimed at the collapse of democracy. However, such actions contradict the social interests and are desirable for one participant, but undesirable for others at the same time. As a rule, it is also accompanied by mutual accusations, threats and ultimatums. This type of relationship is characterised by confrontation, use of unconventional forms of political participation by the opposition.

The range of opportunities and strategies for pro-government and opposition forces increasingly depends on the institutional determinants, which fix the "rules" of the political game and produce the patterns of the relationships between the owners of the largest aggregate capital. The parliamentary opposition influences the government's activities via various channels. The main ones are political control over the cabinet, which is carried out by a vote of confidence (or no confidence); question time for government; influence on the essence of government bills through participation in legislative process and activities of representatives in parliamentary committees; control over the legality of government policy through the Constitutional Court or initiating of referendums. The opposition in parliament usually set a goal to get control over the government. If there are signs of a decrease of support from the parliamentary majority through a motion of no-confidence, the opposition is aimed at forming a new government with other political forces. However, in practice it is difficult to achieve this due to the fact that the pro-government majority has greater access to power resources. In addition, there are constitutional provisions that minimize changes in government for the sake of maintaining the political stability.

### **Trends of political space's division between the power and opposition**

In the 1990s, the Polish party system was characterised by domination of two ideologically opposed political camps: the post-communist left led by the SLD (pl. *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*) and the right from the former *Solidarność* camp. Differentiation of voters' political preferences contributed to the distribution and accumulation of social capital by parties. During this period, it could be observed the trends of decreasing efficiency and legitimacy of existing institutions, in particular the government and political parties. Such course of events resulted in decrease of democratisation level in 2003. This trend was also confirmed by Freedom House data for 1997–2003 (see: Karatnycky et al. 2003). In practice, decrease in efficiency of existing institutions is measured by the amount of transaction costs incurred during the interaction of actors. Since political interaction is about relationship of domination and subjugation, the costs include the amount of power resources that should be engaged by the subject in order to exercise the power over the object. If we take into account that the amount of spent power resources is proportional to the authority and legitimacy of power, then the effectiveness of institutions directly depends on the level of legitimacy of power. Thus, institutions with low legitimacy of government can ensure the stability of the system, but remain ineffective.

In its turn, the low legitimacy of power and high proneness to conflict between dominant social agents within the political space led to complete change of power in

1991, 1993, 1997, 2001. This caused a constant flow of political capital from power to opposition, often accompanied by permanent government crises. One of the reasons for the hourglass effect was lack of informal institutions that could play a stabilising role in the relationship between power and opposition. Thereby it resulted in reducing the transaction costs of the parties to weaken and compete with the political competitor.

However, political opponents were not interested in mutual agreements and long-term rules of the game (it can be proved by adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland only in 1997). They believed that maintaining a relatively high level of inter-party competition through the division of electorate on ideological grounds as a source of political capital was the most important task.

Disposition of political parties is required for maintaining the status and symbolic types of capital. At that time, it was treated as a foundation for post-communists and post-opposition. It is worth agreeing with the opinion of Ukrainian researcher, N. Natalina, that "since political struggle is accompanied by symbolic struggle for nominalisation of political phenomena and processes, symbolic capital becomes crucial for legitimising the claims of the elite group to power and gaining credit of trust in the form of political capital from the population during electoral processes" (Natalina 2008: p. 88). However, status capital has been gradually losing its primary synergy due to the frequent repositioning of political parties. There was a striking difference between the declared programme of the government and its implementation, as well as difficult economic situation in the country. Each parliamentary election, as well as frequent government crises, became a kind of bifurcation point during the process of democratisation conferring the signs of dissipation. Such saturation points highlighted democratic instability as a result of inefficiency of the ruling elite in resolving socio-economic issues and democratisation. On the other hand, such points emphasised the problem of accumulation and conversion of social, primarily economic, capital by main political actors. Economic capital played an important role in strategies of both ruling and opposition elites. However, under the conditions of dynamic privatisation and development of market relations, the parties and their leaders could not manage to accumulate it. Both the post-communists and the post-opposition mainly did not influence the privatisation of large industrial facilities. They did not become their owners and lost their rights to receive future economic dividends. Consequently, no new agents have appeared in the political space, who were involved in the political and economic fields at the same time. The situation was reminded the effect of capitalism without capitalists. In term of the middle class, it was usually the social base of centrist liberal parties and remained at the forming stage.

There was an acute shortage of social capital in the total capital of the parties. First of all, such course of events occurred due to the legacy of socialism. As noted by the Polish scholar E. Wnuk-Lipiński, "such a legacy significantly influenced on the formation of social capital, consolidation of so-called immoral collectivism in the transformation from communism to democracy, and the dichotomy "we" and "they". In the 1990s, such a legacy advanced into "tribal corporatism" based on solidarity, which was built on threats from other groups or governmental policy during the transformation period" (Wnuk-Lipiński

2005: p. 165). A similar position was stood by the Polish sociologist E. Mokrzycki, who believed that weak influence of pro-democracy and pro-market forces was related to resistance of certain environments. He stated that "the strongest resistance is organised, where decline in real income became the main indicator of social degradation" (Mokrzycki 2001: p. 65).

Increase in income inequality led to growing dissatisfaction with the standard of living and dramatic gap between government and citizens. Such fact did not facilitate creation of a bridge of social capital, but contributed to the development of social exclusion, rather than "inclusion" in the activities of communities. Thus, such course of events has ultimately led to reduction of citizens' political participation. This period was characterised by lack of sustainable influence of actors on social environment and blurring of boundaries between the private and public. There were no mechanisms for self-cleansing of the political elite due to politicians' beliefs on different normative (formal and customary) standards that are mandatory for the elite and society. In addition, the lack of mutual interflow of economic and political spheres made the difference (Dzwończyk 2009: p. 223). If we take into account the fact that political parties relied on social capital in their conversion strategies, it had rather small share and was mostly evenly distributed between the two successive agents in power under such conditions.

Steady division of electorate into supporters of post-communist and post-opposition forces suggested the specifics of the voter habitus, which was largely determined by political culture and traditions formed during the communist regime and new democratic values, that were at the approbation stage and promulgated by the parties on the political level. Such course of events did not contribute to the level of solidarity in separate communities and in society as a whole. Moreover, it added complexity to the establishment of freedom and democracy in the political sphere, despite the support of deterrent forces by the electorate. At the same time, strong voter preferences made paternal relations between parties to be potentially successful.

Thus, the process of democratisation of the Polish political system in the 1990s was accompanied by constant competition of stratification and aligning forces and highlighted the rhythmic fluctuations of the process of democratisation of the country's political system. Permanent loss of political capital by the ruling elite and frequent rebooting the government have blurred the identification of stratification and aligning forces and given a chance for new actors for accumulating protest potential and filling in the vacuum.

The established trend to rhythmic cycles was changed after 2001, when new political actors appeared on the political scene. In particular, it comes about the centre-right *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO) and the conservative *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS). Thus, centre of confrontation in the political field has been changed from the "left-right" axis to the "centre-right-right" (Kubát 2010: p. 100–101). Since then, the intensity of political rivalry between the parliamentary parties PO and PiS has not changed significantly. However, regardless of the government change, there was no rapprochement or cooperation between the two dominant parties during the next elections, such as in the Czech Republic in 1998, when the two largest parties signed an opposition agreement.

Polarisation potential of the Smolensk tragedy excluded any opportunity of the agreement between the main rivals. In 2010, after the tragic death of President L. Kaczynski, representative of the government PO, B. Komorowski won the elections. As a result, the opposition PiS has significantly lost its influence over the government. After the presidential election, disputes over the reasons for the plane crash have been dominating during the public debates. PiS has consistently called into question the conclusions of the government commission and the prosecutor's office. PiS took a position that responsibility for the air crash remained a delegitimising factor in the results of the presidential elections, which were won "accidentally". This led to a violation of the balance between the ruling and opposition legitimacy in accordance with P. Norton (2008: p. 243). As a result of this strategy, the PiS enhanced the level of fragmentation of the parliamentary opposition. Its ally *Ruch Palikota* was interested in a constant confrontation, at the same time the SLD was more restrained.

Analysis of the relationships between the ruling coalition and the parliamentary opposition after 2007 allows to conclude that they came up to the existing patterns of the majority democracy model and retained the "negative" attribute. This meant that confrontation dominated over the cooperation, and there was no progress between the government and the opposition in terms of curbing animosity. Moreover, there was a lack of communication between the two competing parties. Self-removal of the PiS leader, J. Kaczynski, from participation in the National Security Council, which was led by the President of the Republic of Poland, non-participation in meetings with the President and the Prime Minister, and meaningful absence during the most important parliamentary debates became a metaphorical event. Narrowing of cooperation between parliamentary parties that was reflected in blocking or rejecting of opposition's legislative initiatives and preferences towards ineffective symbolic actions (such as attempts to dismiss the government or individual minister), stood in a way of the search for optimal policy solutions (Antoszewski 2014: p. 31).

Existence of political opposition usually indicates the existence of a competitive party system, where each of the competing parties has particular ideology. Thus, pluralism as a fundamental principle of democracy is enshrined in practice. However, the separation of powers and opposition is not a guarantee for successful democratic development. With regards to the Polish case, there is a difficulty of distinguishing the opposition as such due to the changing nature of the status of parliamentary political parties. In general, there are several markers that indicate the conditionality of its differentiation from the ruling parties.

Firstly, low party discipline, which caused by inter-factional migration of MPs. For instance, representatives of ruling parties *Unia Wolności* in 2000 and *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (PSL) in 2003 joined the opposition.

Secondly, parliamentary opposition was fairly factionalised in early 2000s. In 2005, it consisted of 5 parliamentary parties' representatives, which were united in deputy groups and factions of 303 deputies in total. In 2007, its structure consisted of representatives of 4 political parties (219 members in total). The emergence of new

opposition factions was caused not by ideological differences, but competition for leadership.

Thirdly, there was a trend for a continuous decrease in indicator of the effective number of parliamentary parties<sup>1</sup>. In particular, in 1991 it was amounted to 9.8, in 1993 – 3.9, in 1997 – 2.9, in 2001 – 3.6, in 2005 – 4.0, in 2007 – 2.82 (Sula 2008: p. 315). Under these circumstances, we can observe the formation of minority governments in early 2000s. In 2003–2004, there was a minority coalition government of L. Miller, meanwhile in 2005–2006, the minority government of K. Marcinkiewicz. Minority coalition of the government was formed by two or more parliamentary parties. Their common feature is absence of an absolute majority of parliamentary seats. Accordingly, such governments need to seek the support of the majority in order to get a vote of confidence. On the other hand, parties, which formally expressed a vote of confidence in the formed governments, can be barely called opposition. Thus, in 2005 their loyalty declared PSL (pl. *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*), *Self-Defence* (pl. *Samoobrona*) and *Liga Polskich Rodzin*. Support of the opposition, which, in fact, was larger in number, contributed to an increase in duration of governments. For instance, between 1990 and 2015, the average duration of minority coalition governments in Poland was 0.6 and majority coalition governments 1.45 (Romaniuk, Lytvyn 2016: p. 263). It should be noted that the minority governments had approximately the same time span as the majority governments, which is essential in achieving democratic stability.

The specific of minority governments is in their significant attention to relations with opposition parties in parliament due to the fact that any conflict can result in a vote of no confidence. Representatives of opposition parties, which formally create the parliamentary majority, find themselves in a rather favourable situation by forcing the government to act more responsibly. Therefore, minority governments consider not only the allocation of political forces, but also certain arrangements made during its creation. In addition, they are more flexible, institutionally sensitive, accountable, and transparent in the implementation of their policies. Since the adoption of legislation requires the approval of opposition factions, it promotes more involvement of the inter-party and non-partisan model of relations, such as: joint work in parliamentary commissions and working groups on the coordination of laws. However, such governments are considered to be unstable, volatile, and inefficient.

If the parties, which are considered to be an opposition one, do not participate in the formation of the government, do not enter into power institutions and take a critical attitude towards the authorities, the questions arise: Is the political space bipolar? Is there a clear demarcation line between the power and opposition? Apparently, it relates to the agents' ability to hold positions simultaneously, not only in several different fields

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<sup>1</sup> This indicator is used in political sciences for studying electoral and political party systems and for measuring the level of fragmentation of the political party system. Measuring how many parties, weighted according to size, are in a party system in a given election, the effective number of (electoral/parliamentary) parties is calculated employing the following formulae:  $ENEP=1/v_i^2$  and  $ENPP=1/s_i^2$  (respectively), where  $v_i/s_i$  is the proportion of votes/seats of the  $i$ -th party (see more: Party Systems and Governments Observatory 2021).

(i.e. in economic, cultural, political), but also within the same political field. Thus, the redistribution of these zones is a coordinated process that serves as an adaptation mechanism allowing parties not to lose their status capital and contributing to the stable functioning of democratic institutions as a criterion of consolidation.

In Poland's party system, it should be noted more clean division of political field between the main players. Such conclusion can be made on the basis of data on the fractionation of parliamentary parties. A. Romaniuk and V. Lytvyn believe that the higher this indicator is, the more effective the internal democracy of the party systems. At the same time, decrease in the fractionation of government parties is an indicator of the growth of their power and increase in size (the number of parliamentary seats). The same can be stated in terms of opposition parties. It should be noted that as of 2015, the level of fractionalisation of political parties in Poland was 0.6. This figure is one of the lowest among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, there is a trend for a decrease in the fractionalisation of government parties in comparison with the opposition ones. The difference between the indicators was 0,16 in Poland, meanwhile it was amounted to 0,07 in the Czech Republic, 0,3 in Slovakia, and 0,31 in Hungary (Romaniuk, Lytvyn 2016: p. 382). On the one hand, it demonstrates that government parties have a lower level of internal democracy than the opposition parties. On the other hand, such statistics indicate that government offices are formed as a result of cooperation of small number of parties around the strongest and the largest. For instance, from November 2007 to October 2011 the Coalition Government of D. Tusk consisted of two parliamentary parties: centre-right PO and PSL. The right-wing party PiS was the strongest opposition party.

PO and PiS's domination in Poland's party system has changed the ideological component of division into the power and the opposition; the process was accompanied by a transition from left – right competition to right – centre-right competition. It is worth noting that since the 1993 parliamentary elections until 2005 elections, the opposition had consisted of parties and groups opposed to the old regime (1993–1997 and 2001–2005) (Sula 2010: p. 580). They emphasised on their anti-communism and bipolarity, which made the opposition bilateral in its nature. Post-communist parties were in opposition in 1997–2001. However, the alternation of parties in power, as well as the change of poles of the political spectrum, only partially reveals the functional side of the activities of the ruling parties in the context of their influence on democratic consolidation.

### **Forces of stratification and equalisation**

This effect is well-illustrated by the *fluctuation theorem* developed by P. Sorokin. Under "fluctuation" he understood the permanent oscillation from the optimal value. At the same time, this process is typical not only for socio-cultural systems, but also for specific fields, in particular, politics. The process of fluctuation itself goes through a series of successive stages: disintegration – crisis – mobilisation of forces – a new socio-cultural order. In fact, the scholar has developed and offered a model that reflected the

properties, interconnections, and relations in society; in a modified form, we can make reference to it in order to explain interrelations between the power and the opposition in the context of democratisation processes. According to the above-mentioned model, cyclical fluctuations of super-systems occur mainly with a non-rhythmic regularity, which determines the fluctuation of societies between progress and regression, development of democratic freedoms and authoritarianism, peaceful and military transition, revolutionary and evolutionary development. However, Sorokin did not exclude that the rhythm of these cycles may have trends. Changes occur in a certain quantitative and qualitative direction until they reach the "saturation point". Afterwards, they proceed by inertia or forcibly. Sorokin believes that if the potential of political movement in one direction is exhausted, a reverse movement will start on a new basis. Thus, due to cyclicity and evolution, one power system is replaced by another, alternative system, which under the influence of new value orientations, will start moving to the next "saturation point". According to P. Sorokin's concept there is a constant struggle between the forces of stratification and those of equalisation in any society at any time (Sorokin 1947). Sharp fluctuations of the political stratification profile in one of directions increase the pressure of opposing forces and bring the stratification profile to equilibrium.

Referring to this research, we would like to assume that deviation from democracy indicates a non-equilibrium state of a system that seeks a balance. As a case study, we offer to examine complex and contradictory democratic processes in Poland after 2015. This bifurcation point is marked by PiS's victory in October 2015 parliamentary elections. It has received 37,58% of the vote and formed a one-party majority government headed by B. Szydło. It is worth mentioning that party leader J. Kaczyński, who had considerable status and reputational capital, had no official position in the government, but retained the leverage of influence on executive power. The same year, PiS representative, A. Duda won the presidential election. Since then, this one-party government, with the support of the parliamentary majority and the president began to take steps that did not contribute to democratic consolidation. According to Polish scholar M. Tyrata, transition of Polish democracy towards a hybrid system has been intensifying during the times of PiS after the 2015 parliamentary elections (Tyrata 2019: p. 71). Such course of events was affected by the antagonistic model of government. In particular, the independent judiciary in Poland has faced strong political pressure. First of all, the problem was related to the amendments to the Constitutional Court Act and the procedure of electing five new members of the Constitutional Court in November-December 2015. The new law established that decisions of the Constitutional Court shall be taken by two-thirds, not by a simple majority. The rules hampered decision-making and delayed resolutions in various urgent matters. The Constitutional Court declared this law unconstitutional. As another instance of political interference into the judicial system, we may recall the merger of the offices of the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice. In particular, from 2014 to 2017, according to Bertelsmann Stiftung, the indicator of judiciary independence has decreased from 9 to 7 (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2018: p. 10). The mass demonstrations supporting democracy that took place in the country at the end of

2015 should be treated as the response to this stratification policy. The PiS' reaction to the activation of direct forms of political participation was reflected in amendments to the law on public assemblies. It was aimed at giving priority to meetings organised by public authorities, churches and religious organisations, as well as "regular meetings". Such rigid measures have significantly restrained freedom of assembly and activated the "forces of equalisation". Negative reaction of the opposition, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the director of the OSCE Office has forced the President not to sign the law, but to file it to the Constitutional Court for examination. According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung, in 2014–2017, freedom of expression decreased from 10 maximum points to 8 points. The indicator that diagnoses the observance of rights to assembly and associations has decreased from 10 to 9 (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2018).

At the same time, all the major political players, including citizens that are accustomed to the democratic nature of institutions and procedures, had different views on organisation of democracy. This is one of the features of a consolidated democracy. Democratic institutions in Poland can carry out their functions and make political decisions in accordance with legal procedures. However, when the PiS gained power, systemic weaknesses were observed in democratic practice. In particular, the decisions of the Constitutional Court were partially implemented in case of limitations in accountability of executive power was limited. There were differences between the government and the president, on the one hand, and the Constitutional Court, on the other. Such course of events had a negative impact on the stability of democratic institutions and decreased the corresponding indicator from 10 in 2014 to 8 in 2017. According to Bertelsmann Stiftung, the indicators of efficiency and legitimacy of democratic institutions and the indicator of separation of powers decreased by 20%. As a result of PiS ruling, the country's democratic status has decreased from 9.5 to 8.6 (from the maximum of 10) (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2018).

The *Corruption Perceptions Index* is important for understanding the ruling elite's conversion strategies. Transparency International annually has been conducting similar surveys in various countries. The level of corruption in the public sector is assessed on a scale from 0 (most corrupt) to 100 points (least corrupt). It is worth mentioning that from 2012 to 2015, the country gradually climbed up the scale of less corrupt countries from 58 to 63. However, the perception of corruption increased and in 2017, Poland's rating dropped to 60 (Transparency International 2017). Political corruption is a challenge for honest business due to the fact that politicians use their positions to receive benefits by converting political capital into economic capital, enrooting nepotism. P. Moreira, the managing director of the *Transparency International*, thinks that "Corruption chips away at democracy to produce a vicious cycle, where corruption undermines democratic institutions and, in turn, weak institutions are less able to control corruption" (Transparency International 2019). It is interesting that despite the institutional changes and negative trends in democratic development, the party preferences of the Polish voters remain relatively stable.

## Conclusions

The relations between power and opposition in Poland within the political space were determined by the processes of conversion of public capital and affected the nature of the distribution of state meta-capital. The nature of redistribution of state meta-capital between the government and opposition sets the parameters of the permanent fluctuation of the state political system, which was asynchronous and influenced the effectiveness of democratisation. This factor took the form of stratification or aligning force.

Trends for strengthening/weakening democracy in Poland take place on the background of the permanent formation of two opposite poles in the political field of the state. Other political players build their strategies around these poles. At the same time, the division "left – right" and "right – centre-right" is rather conditional and mainly reflects not religious, political, or socio-cultural distinctions in Polish society, but the main feature of this political field is dichotomy.

The analysis of a number of indicators and current political process in Poland, demonstrates that deflection from democracy increases the distance between two competing/conflicting parties – pro-government and opposition. This situation automatically accumulates the potential of pole's force.

The increase of the distance between the power and the opposition is usually accompanied by the dissemination of opposing approaches to current topics in the political discourse, which are spread through social networks. This causes polarisation of the active part of the electorate and provokes political absenteeism for the rest of the electorate. In the light of democracy, this fact leads to the situation, when the minority rules over the majority, potentially threatening the crisis of liberal democracy. The trend of convergence of democratisation has been identified on the basis of the synergetic approach. Such trend is a product of conflicting model of the relationships between power and the opposition.

Reconstruction of practices, patterns of behaviour of pro-government and opposition parties can be commensurated with pole strength and the distance between them. Therefore, the change of poles of the political space during the repositioning led to insignificant revisions in the relationship between power and the opposition. However, this factor played an important role in terms of prospects for democratisation. The distance between the two poles and reproduction of the conflict model in the relations between political actors has not contributed to the emergence and fixation of institutions of constructive interaction in the political field as a form of self-organisation. This fact added the complexity to forecasting of the behaviour of political players and the political system in Poland, determined random fluctuations and aggravated negative consequences of the convergence of democratisation processes. Therefore, democratisation of political system that did not lost the characteristics of dissipation has been subject to significant fluctuations.

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